



VIA PACIS

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WHAT SHOULD REALLY MATTER

Kathy Woodward

and she gave birth to her firstborn son.
She wrapped him in swaddling clothes
and laid him in a manger."

(Luke 2:7)

the birth of Jesus. An event like so many
countless births which take place each day.
But from this one event, the world was
changed. And because of this one event, we
can be changed. We can begin to see WHAT
SHOULD REALLY MATTER.

For some, it is not difficult to get caught up in
the commercialism of this time of year.
After all, Christmas decorations and such
are donned some stores since mid-
October.

It is cold outside in Iowa right now,
and in many places in the Midwest. It is
cold inside too, I notice, as we get lost in all
the little things of this time of year. Our
focus is so easily diverted away from WHAT
SHOULD REALLY MATTER.

I have raised very much in the midst of the
consumerism of our society, it has been a
difficult journey to let go of my own search
for more. I have been looking to fill some
sort of emptiness within me with "things"
I gradually built up my own little world
over the years. But holding on to all this
means I am centering on me...and not
WHAT SHOULD REALLY MATTER.

I am reminded of one day this past summer
when I was wandering about San Francisco.
Often I found myself alone in the City yet
in the midst of the over 6,000 homeless
people. I guess many people are alone
everywhere, for that matter...even
right here.

On the particular occasion I was near the
public library just off the Civic Center
BART (train) station and I was quite ill
physically and pretty down on my life,
unsettled with my circumstances of the
moment.

The homeless and other "throwaways" of
society gather in throngs in this area. It is
not uncommon to walk down the street and
see more than a dozen individuals ask
you for money or food in less than a block.
Each has a different story. Each has a very
real need.

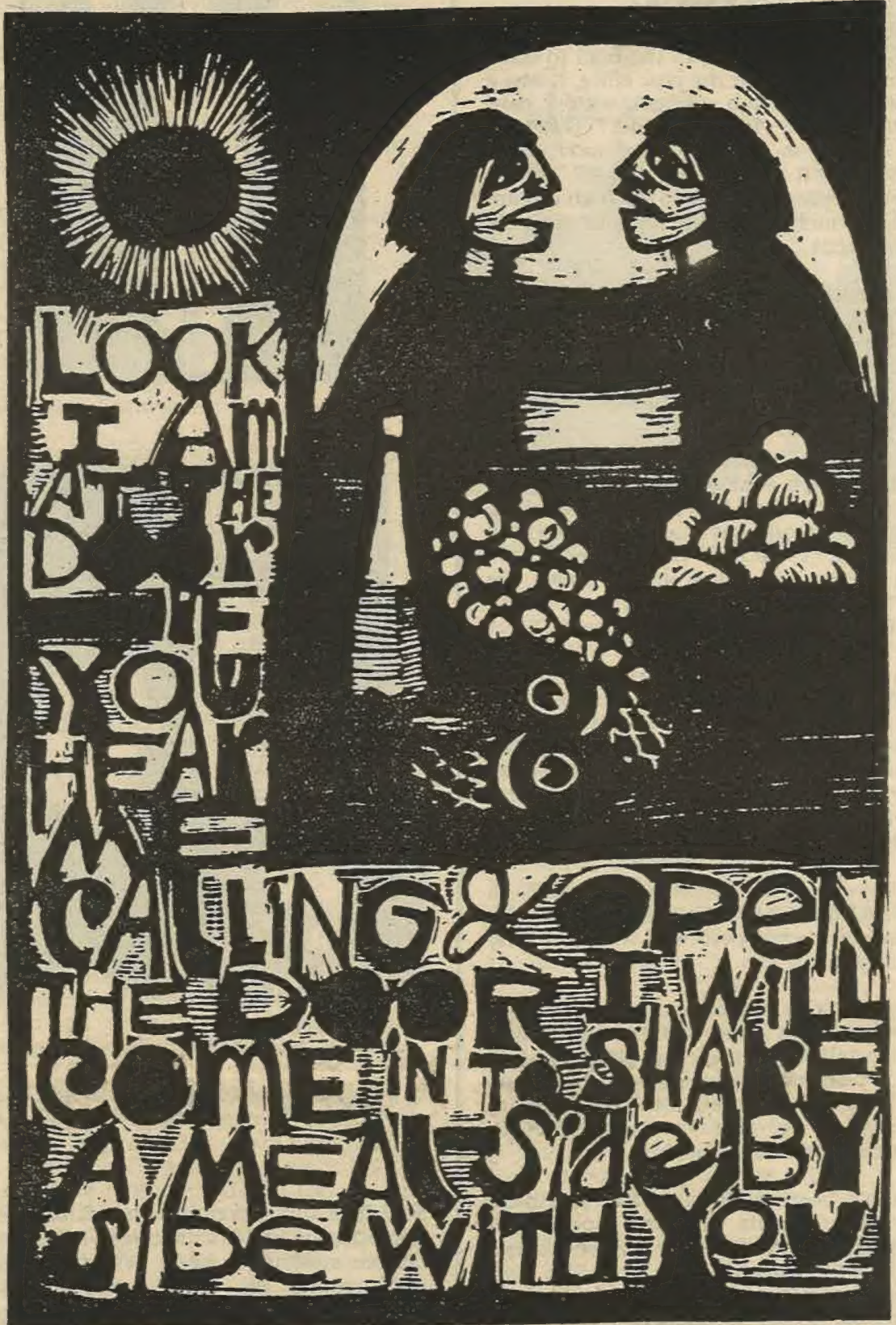
On this particular day, however, I was
wondering all I passed by, thinking only of
my current situation...and my very real
physical and emotional distress. A young
man approached as I muddled down the
street. I tensed up. I did not have anything
to give that day. But he wanted nothing.

"Are you alright?" he asked softly. I
paused around to see if he was really
talking to me. He placed his hand gently on
my arm in a most non-threatening manner
and asked again, "Are you alright?"

I looked up at him. He could not have been
much older than 20. His clothes, likely all
he owned thrown over his slight frame,
were layered against the summer winds and
the afternoon fog rolling in off the Bay.

He nodded and he smiled. "Are you sure?" he
pressed me.

"I'm okay," I told him. Better now
because of his concern. Stronger now
because he cared and treated me like a
human, not some faceless drifter in a
throwaway city.



He paused a moment, as if he did not
really believe me. I smiled faintly, trying to
be convincing...and, satisfied finally with
my answer, he bounced away, back to a
small group of men gathered on the library
steps. I felt many eyes watching me as I
wandered on down the street...and I felt safe
and secure.

I am reminded of this encounter often, and
as I reflect on this holy season I think of
how important it is for all of us to react and
interact with mere humanness to each
other. It is important for all of us not to
just walk by others as if we do not see their
hurt, their rejection, their pain, their
humanity.

All of us, I am convinced, are needy and
poor regardless of our lot in life or
economic status, for we all suffer in one
way or another...some physically, some
spiritually. We are in a country where
things and power are more important than
people and love. We are in a country which
rejects WHAT SHOULD REALLY MATTER
and we now find ourselves as
outcasts, "throwaways" because of our
beliefs. But then, so did Jesus.

I see nothing different here in Iowa than I
saw in San Francisco. The numbers may be
less here, but the needs are the same. The
need to be respected. The need to be looked
upon as human despite the often very
inhumane circumstances that we find
ourselves in. The need to be loved. All of us
have these needs.

So often I see folks, like me, walk by
society's "throwaways" and act as if they do
not exist. Not a word. Not a glance. Not one
acknowledgement that these people are
actually people, perhaps feeling that by
ignoring them, they will go away. If we do
not acknowledge it, we mistakenly feel we
do not have to deal with it.

This is the season when we are reminded
that we need to acknowledge each other.
This is the time of year when we need to
remember that we are called to reach out to
each other with humanness. This is when
we should begin to look at and act on WHAT
SHOULD REALLY MATTER.

And we need to continue to do this each day
of our lives. That's what Jesus' birth...his
whole life, actually...stood
for...humanness. And WHAT SHOULD
REALLY MATTER.

When we can actually react and interact
with humanness in the daily situations of
our lives, I believe we will be truly blessed.

Then we can know that it is us of whom the
angels sing:

"Glory to God in the highest and on
earth peace to those on whom God's favor
rests."

(Luke 2:14)

And isn't that WHAT SHOULD REALLY
MATTER?

AROUND THE HOUSE

Yesterday we got a slip in the mail to come pick up a package at the post office. It was a whole case of fresh oranges with a card reading simply "from a friend." Given all the craziness which now surrounds Christmas, it was wonderful to have a Christmas present arrive in such an elegant manner which was so attuned to our cold season needs.

This Christmas season has brought us a new BVS volunteer, Emily Sims. Emily is also working with Clarion Alliance. She's committed to at least a year of service following her recent graduation from Yale Law School.

Hopefully, two other new BVS volunteers will be coming shortly after the new year giving us more time to work on remodelling Ligutti House and Lazarus House. With all the help the folks from Sacred Heart have given us, in both labor and supplies, we hope to have the first floor of Ligutti House and the upstairs bathroom done soon.

Although we are looking forward to and enjoying our new community members, we were saddened when Albrecht had to leave suddenly to return to Germany because his father was ill. Unfortunately, his father passed away shortly after Albrecht's return. Our thoughts are with Albrecht and his family.

Kay Meyer had her baby in September, a chubby (9 lbs at birth) baby boy named Neil. He was, of course, born with a head of tiny red ringlets.

The community children are getting bigger every day. Both Luke Bobbitt and Jordan Dawson (alias Boo-boo) had birthdays this month. The rest are also growing by leaps and bounds. Jeffy has started going to preschool in the afternoon and the other little ones won't be far behind.

Norman's been working at the Salvation Army ringing bells this Christmas. He's saving for his return trip out East. Carla's been busily working with the PTA and other school based groups. She's bound and determined to stay on top of all the changes happening in the school system.

Carla, Corey and I have all been trying to stay in shape by running. Corey's been the most successful, peaking by running the Chicago Marathon in three hours and twenty-seven minutes. Carla's been bothered by a few leg injuries so if you see her limping around the house you'll know why.

Jeff's been working hard over at Ligutti House, supervising all the work groups who've come over to help and doing a good bit of the work himself. When he's not working on the house he seems to be struggling to fix our always in disrepair cars.

NEEDS

MONEY

lamps
meats
fresh fruits and vegetables
tampons and feminine napkins
dish detergent
garbage bags
potatoes
onions
butter or margarine
Sheets and towels
Dried beans



Love thy Neighbor Love thy Self

Well here it is November and all the media is gearing us up for Christmas. I can hardly believe summer is over. Thanksgiving is just around the corner, and all these holidays make me aware of all the things I have to be thankful for. It also makes it that much more apparent that theres a lot of people who don't have much to look forward to during the holidays.

The kids and I are doing pretty well, and I feel so blessed to have the chance to raise them in such a loving and giving atmosphere. I have watched them grow this last year and learn what it is to share what they have with others that are in need. I don't think there could be a better learning experience for the kids or myself then living in community.

I have been keeping very busy on several projects around the house. We had to put a new floor in Lazarus house it had gotten pretty bad in in some areas. I don't think you can blame it though. I figure about any of these bathrooms see 10 to 15 baths a day. We have also begun a large project at Ligutti house. There has ben an on going battle with some leaks in the upstairs bathroom for several years. We were going to repair the leak and just patch in some sheet rock but the leaks were extensive and we have a big job ahead of us. Now we have three rooms completely stripped and have found quite a few problems with wiring outlets and switches caused by the slow leaks. Most of it was slow drips from poorly done joints in the copper. I figure the Lord willing we'll find the money to do this and fix the roofs on our two main houses.

Around the main house (Dingman) it's been pretty much business as usual. The house is full and when we do get an opening it fills up fairly quickly. We've got plenty of

MASS SCHEDULE

January 24

February 21

March 20

Mass begins at 7:30 p.m. Please feel welcome to come early and stay late.

Poems appearing in this issue are reprinted with permission from Threatened With Resurrection by Julia Esquivel, Church of the Brethren Press, 1983.

THANKS

We would like to thank all the Church that donate not only their money but their time. You are only one of the reasons we can keep our houses going. It's nice to see many more Churches and people coming to our houses. We hope you get as much pleasure out of coming as we get out of having you visit us.

Three Churches we would like to give special thanks to: Sacred Heart church, West Des Moines, and the Churches of Clarion and Eagle Grove.

Sacred Heart Church has been instrumental in the help on rehabilitating Ligutti House. Not only in the contribution of money but the great amount of peace and time you have spent in helping continue our work, God Bless.

Eagle Grove and Clarion for coming up on a month with just about anything we need for , from Oil to T.V. 's . We look forward to your coming and will have the coffee and God Bless.

kids around which keeps us on our toes. to see all these kids react with each other is a great source of enjoyment for me. I love my kids that without the love of other people we would have nothing.

I think that this is the hardest time of year for most people. The stress I see in the faces of people who come to us for help. the people who I see in the organizations designed to try to help them. I feel for the people. Even those who seem to have everything, can find this a hard time with the various problems that seem to come at this time of year. I hope we all will have what's in our hearts to help those around us in need. And I hope that the Lord will bless everyone at this very special time of year. also. Merry Christmas and God bless all. **Jeff and Kids.**



A CHRISTMAS ACT OF FAITH

This is a copy of Fr. Frank's weekly bulletin letter to his parishioners in St. James and Holy Family Parishes, for Dec. 28/29. He also read this letter on the line at SAC before he crossed the line.)

CHRISTMAS ACT OF FAITH

I'm writing this letter before the line crossing at SAC on the 28th. If all goes as planned I'll be back to Logan in time to celebrate our Saturday night mass with my eighth 'ban and bar' letter from SAC in hand.

Much of my personal internal attention lately has been taken up with the Dec. 28th SAC Witness. Each time I have decided to cross the line at SAC, I go through a major personal discernment process. I'm forced to reexamine my most basic beliefs and assumptions about the world and my Faith.

It's never been easy for me to risk leaving home and going to jail. Believe me, the thought of doing another six months in a county jail is not at all appealing.

For me to risk leaving you and going back to jail, there must be some compelling and urgent reason. I believe there is. I sincerely believe this is no time to stop protesting nuclear weapons.

Despite the end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union and with George Bush's proposed nuclear weapons cuts; our nuclear arsenal remains awesome, second to none, a threat to tens of hundreds of millions of human beings, a planetary time bomb, moral affront in the highest degree and a gross human obscenity to God.

These weapons are a direct result of the power politics of "might makes right" that makes the lives of nations states. It is the same power politics that ruled the world in Jesus' times. Our nuclear arsenal and military establishment is simply an extension the Roman Legions that occupied Palestine in the first century, and put Jesus on the cross.

When SAC changes into the "Strategic Nuclear Command" in June, nothing morally or militarily will change. It will still be in direct command of thousands of strategic nuclear weapons. No nations, no people, no President, and no military command has the moral right to such awesome destructive weapons.

I simply can not bring myself to reconcile these weapons of mass destruction to the Gospel we've been pledged. My crossing the line at SAC is first and foremost an act of Faith. It is a statement of my belief in Christmas and the birth of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. As an act of Faith, I am as certain of its Truth as I am of the Creed we profess each Sunday, at Mass.

People keep asking me "Why risk so much personally for so little results?" Acts of Faith are not supposed to be linked to effective results. They stand on their own merits, in the Truth they profess. We could just as well ask what effective results has the birth of Jesus, his death and resurrection brought into the world? The answer to this question can only be found in the hearts and souls of people of good Faith, who throughout the centuries have lived their lives in the Spirit and Ways of Jesus. There exists no other measuring stick.

This I know for sure, that the world we live in is terribly troubled and in pain. The majority of humanity is born into poverty & violence. Today's Christ child is born again and again a thousand times over every day "wracked by hunger and dying in the Third World." He is born again and again in the ghettos and into poverty families throughout the First World. This poverty and human misery is unnecessary. The human family can and must do better!

This I also know, the mission and work of the Strategic Air Command, soon to be Strategic Nuclear Command, in Bellevue Ne. is directly connected and related to this gross unjust human condition. As one who professes to believe in Jesus, in Christmas, and in the Reign of God, I cross the line at SAC to say "No" to Nuclear Weapons and "Yes" to Prince of Peace.



Dec 28th, 1991 "Feast of the Holy Innocent" line Cross'ers at SAC in Bellview Ne.

- 1) Fr. Frank Cordaro, Logan Iowa
- 2) Mary Moore, Mondamin Iowa
- 3) Cassie Moore, Mondamin Iowa
- 4) Kathleen Granger, Woodbine Iowa
- 5) Charlie Wolford, Mo. Valley Iowa
- 6) Gurina Wolford, Mo. Valley Iowa
- 7) Mark Wolford, Omaha Ne.
- 8) Kathryn Epperson, Logan Iowa
- 9) Fr. Tom Coenen, Leon Iowa
- 10) Angela Cordaro, Des Moines Iowa
- 11) Brian Terrell, Maloy Iowa
- 12) Anissa Lindsey, Des Moines Iowa
- 13) Jean Basinger, Des Moines Iowa
- 14) Mark Rogness, Des Moines Iowa
- 15) Jim Dubert, Des Moines Iowa
- 16) Mark Kenny, Omaha Ne.
- 17) Kathy Woodward, Omaha Ne.
- 18) Mark Darby, Omaha Ne.
- 19) Mary Ledbetter, Omaha Ne.
- 20) Lisa Stimple-Padios, Omaha Ne.
- 21) Michael Sprong, Marion S.D.
- 22) Phil Runkel, Milwaukee WI.

Norman's Whereabouts

I want people to know even though I'm leaving the Worker I'll be coming back to Des Moines for visits. Maybe put money in the bank, to someday open a House of Hospitality for families of inmates somewhere near Mitchellville. I also plan on taking part in some CDs even the one I've been planning which is nothing more than Attending a Mass at Offett Air Force Base and speaking to the Military Priest. How the Military Priest sees God in peacetime.

I also hope to get a job if I find my self low on money to travel to my next Catholic Worker.

You see when I leave the Des Moines Catholic Worker I won't be leaving the Catholic Worker Movement. I plan on traveling around America while America is still America, I plan on spending time at each Catholic Worker, working at each house, taking on a part time job to earn enough money to pay for my traveling and to put aside for that Dream of a House. I plan on going home to Massachusetts for a while. I want to spend some time with my whole family and my friends It's been five years since I last spent anytime home. I'm almost feeling like I'm a stranger to my family. I know I'm a stranger to my Nephews and Neices and to my friends children. I want to spend time with my mother who has always been more than a

mother and a friend to me I love you mom. I want a few people to know when I leave the Des Moines Catholic Worker in March that will always be a part of me and that goes for you Sheryl Snodgrass, Lear Dear, Bill and Paul and I Love You. I want people to know I've sold my truck. I'm having a hard time finding Norman the Cat a home. He's a good cat I just might take him with me. I've also got to find a place to store all of Sheryl's stuff before I go in March.

I'm ringing the bell for the Salvation Army this year again. Than find a part time job until March. I've learned that sometime when people make plans to do something, sometimes those plans don't work out like they want them to so I'm trusting in the Lord to see me through.

It's snowing out and it's the first day of November a couple of days ago children were dressing up in Halloween costumes. It's interesting to see how fast this world is changing. I hope as I travel around this country I hope the changes aren't as fast as the changing weather.

Well I'll be around until March and there will be more articles to write before and perhaps after I go Thank you Norman Searah.

FATHER FRANK'S TRAVELOG

THE GUATEMALA EXPERIENCE

I met up with my Guatemala traveling companions in Des Moines, Sunday night, July 14 at 8:30 pm at the Catholic Worker House. Traveling with me to Guatemala were Maggie Pharris and her three children; Stacy (17), Nick (14), and Zoie (12). Nicole (19), Maggie's niece, and Ion, a co-worker of Maggie's from Hennipen County Hospital, also traveled with us. We drove all night and all day to Laredo, Texas, on the border of the U.S. and Mexico. We spent Monday night in Laredo at a local motel.

The next day we left Maggie's van with some friends. We crossed over to Mexico and took an all day, all night train to Mexico City. From Mexico City, we took an all night, all day bus to the border of Guatemala. Both the train and bus ride would be considered first class traveling in Mexico. My impression of Mexico is that it's a very long country. It's mostly semi-desert with lots and lots of poor people. Just coming into Mexico City, it's 22 million people making it the most populated city in the world, and seeing the large numbers of people living in shacks and abandoned railroad cars next to the tracks, was an eye opener.

We got to the Guatemala border late in the afternoon of Wednesday, July 17th. It was raining. We ran into trouble with the Guatemalan border guards because we did not have visas. With the new government came a new regulation - tourists must now have visas to get into Guatemala. By the time we got it all straightened out, the last bus had left. We spent the night in a motel at the border.

We got up early the next morning and caught a bus. The buses in Guatemala are mostly old school buses. There are almost always three or four people crowded into a seat. For the typical Guatemalan, three on a school bus seat is a tight squeeze. For us larger North Americans, it was very cramped. We did most of our traveling in Guatemala by bus. It is the form of transportation used by the common people.

The road system in Guatemala is primitive by our standards. The best roads are like the worst county roads in northern Missouri. In the rural areas, the roads are dirt. Many are only paths, and no road is straight. In the area we were traveling, all the roads were mountainous. Sometimes, just surviving a bus ride was cause to celebrate.

Almost immediately upon crossing the border, we could tell the difference between Mexico and Guatemala. Guatemala is a rich and bountiful country. Its lush mountainsides and deep valleys are eternally green. There are only two seasons, the dry and the wet. The Guatemalan mountain ranges were formed millions of years ago by volcanoes. It had a mystical, spiritual quality for me.

Six hours from the border, and three buses later, we make it to San Lucas Toliman, our home base. San Lucas is in the western highlands on Lake Atitlan. Lake Atitlan is one of the most beautiful lakes in the world. It is located in the midst of a range of the volcanic mountains. It is breathtaking. San Lucas is one of twelve communities located around Lake Atitlan that are each named after one of the twelve apostles.

We stayed in the Guest House of the Catholic Parish in San Lucas. This parish is a mission of the New Ulm, Minnesota Catholic Diocese. Fr. Greg Schaefer of the New Ulm diocese has been pastor for the last 26 years. The parish includes all of San Lucas, population 20,000, and another 10,000 people who live on surrounding "fincas." A finca is a plantation-type farm used to raise export crops. In the San Lucas area, coffee is the dominant finca crop.

The parish runs a grade school with 600 kids, and an orphanage with 65 kids. Many were made orphans through political violence. The parish also runs a health clinic and a Nutritional Center. The Nutritional Center is where babies are brought who are close to death from malnutrition. Not knowing Spanish, I spent a lot of time at the Nutritional Center helping feed the babies. It ripped my heart out to see these small infants so needlessly close to death.

Fr. Schaefer says these service projects are desperately needed. They receive the bulk of the parish's \$500,000 a year budget - money Fr. Schaefer must raise each year, on his own, in the States. Fr. Schaefer puts his hope for the future in the many small, independent economic improvements and projects the parish has helped to get started over the years. The biggest improvement has been helping people build and own their own homes. Home ownership is rare among the poor. The parish has had several successful home building programs over the years, giving hundreds of families home ownership. Also, over 2,000 people have acquired small patches of land, enabling them to grow a portion of their own food, as well as some coffee for market. There are many masonry, carpentry and welding shops, also started by the parish. The parish itself is the largest employer in the town, with over 320 people on payroll.

In many respects, San Lucas is much better off, economically, than most communities in the area: yet, it suffers under many of the same harsh conditions that afflict the rest of the country. The problem in Guatemala is land; who owns it and who doesn't. Two percent of the wealthiest people control 65% of all the farmland. These lands are divided

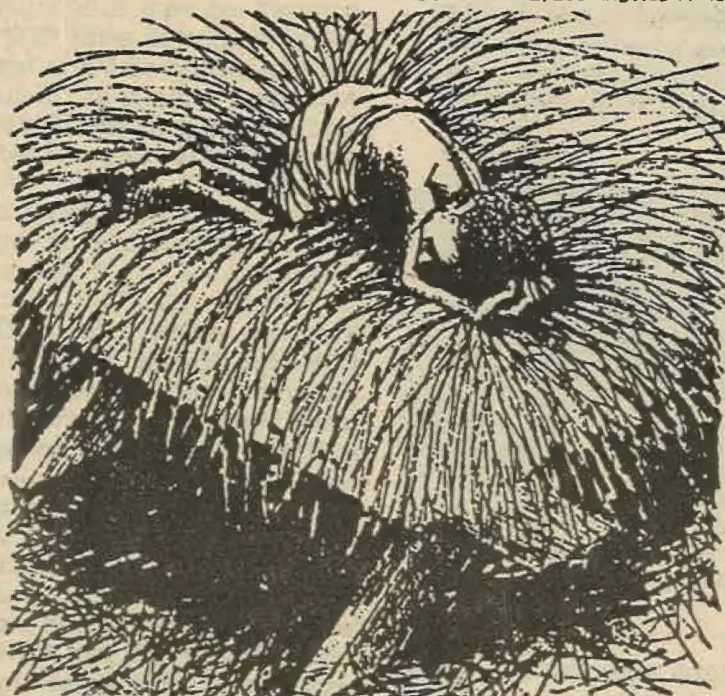
into large plantations called fincas. They grow cash crops like coffee, bananas, and rubber to be sold outside the country. Guatemala is the most industrialized country in Central America. Over 200 North American corporations are doing business in Guatemala. These corporations work closely, and share their large profits, with the wealthiest Guatemalans.

The problem with this system is that the vast majority of Guatemalans do not share in the wealth and resources of their own country. One out of every two kids dies before reaching the age of five. The bottom half of the population lives in dire poverty. The seasonal work on the fincas, and the factory jobs in the city, do not pay for the most basic human needs. The government is powerless to help.

The worst of the poverty is forced upon the Indian population. Guatemalan is the only country in this hemisphere where the original inhabitants, the Mayan Indians, are a majority. One half of its nine million people are full blooded Maya Indians, and 80% of the other half are of mixed blood. The Ladinos, the direct descendants of the Spanish Conquistadors, make up 10% of the population. They are also the wealthiest. (At the peak of the Mayan civilization, they provided for just as many people as now live in Guatemala. Then, they provided a much higher standard of living, at least meeting the basic needs of all the people. This is a sad testimony to five centuries of Christianity in Guatemala.) Maintaining this unjust distribution of wealth is the country's military, and its right wing death squads. The political repression and human rights violations are some of the worst in the world. In the last twelve years, over 100,000 people have been killed through political violence and over 40,000 have disappeared. Most of these victims have been defenseless Indians. Others were teachers, labor organizers and health care workers. Also targeted by right wing death squads were many church workers, priests, and nuns.

During the peak of the repression, in the early 1980's, when the military was stationed in San Lucas, they used the parish guest house as their interrogation and torture center. It was not an easy place to sleep.

PAUL CONRAD/Los Angeles Times



*You shall find him wracked by hunger
and dying in the Third World.*

THEY HAVE THREATENED US WITH RESURRECTION

It isn't the noise in the streets
that keeps us from resting, my friend,
nor is it the shouts of the young people
coming drunk out from "St. Paul's" bar,
nor is it the tumult of those who pass by excitedly
on their way to the mountains.

There is something here within us
which doesn't let us sleep,
which doesn't let us rest,
which doesn't stop pounding
deep inside,
it is the silent, warm weeping
of Indian women without their husbands,
it is the sad gaze of the children
fixed there beyond memory,
in the very pupil of our eyes
which during sleep
though closed, keep watch
with each contradiction
of the heart,
in every awakening.

Now six of them have left us,
and nine in Rabinal,
and two, plus two, plus two
and ten, a hundred, a thousand
a whole army
witness to our pain,
our fear,
our courage,
our Hope!

What keeps us from sleeping
is that they have threatened us with Resurrection!
Because at each nightfall
though exhausted from the endless inventory
of killings since 1954,
yet we continue to love life
and do not accept their death!

They have threatened us with Resurrection
because we have felt their inept bodies
and their souls penetrating ours
doubly fortified.
Because in this marathon of Hope,
there are always others to relieve us
in bearing the courage necessary
to arrive at the goal
which lies beyond death.

They have threatened us with Resurrection
because they will not be able to wrest from us
their bodies,
their souls,
their strength,

their spirit,
nor even their death
and least of all their life.
Because they live
today, tomorrow and always
on the streets baptized with their blood
and in the air which gathered up their cry,
in the jungle that hid their shadows,
in the river that gathered up their laughter,
in the ocean that holds their secrets,
in the craters of the volcanoes,
Pyramids of the New Day
which swallowed up their ashes.

They have threatened us with Resurrection,
because they are more alive than ever before,
because they transform our agonies,
and fertilize our struggle,
because they pick us up when we fall,
and rise up like giants
before the fear of those demented gorillas.

They have threatened us with Resurrection
because they do not know life (poor things!).

That is the whirlwind
which does not let us sleep,
the reason why asleep, we keep watch,
and awake, we dream.

No, it's not the street noises
nor the drunken shouts from St. Paul's bar,
nor the clamor from the ball-players.
It is the internal cyclone of a kaleidoscopic struggle
which will heal that wound of the Quetzal
fallen in Ixcán,
it is the earthquake soon to come
that will shake the world
and put everything in its place.

No brother,
it is not the noise in the streets
which does not let us sleep.

Accompany us then on this vigil
and you will know what it is to dream!
You will then know
how marvelous it is
to live threatened with Resurrection!

To dream awake,
to keep watch asleep,
to live while dying
and to know oneself
already resurrected!

-Julia Esquivel

spent twelve days in San Lucas. Maggie
an ideal guide. Four years ago she
worked as a nurse in San Lucas. She has
come back to visit once a year ever since.
She keeps in close contact with many
people throughout the year. She has
her home in Minneapolis to
Guatemalan refugees, some of whom come
to San Lucas. She took me to visit many
of her friends in San Lucas and the
surrounding area. We talked to ordinary
people, and church and health care
workers. Everyone we talked to confirmed
that things are not getting any better. There
are military spies in every community and
factory. In Guatemala today, if you
speak out against unjust labor conditions,
advocate for a more just land
distribution system, you are soon killed.

Two high points for me in Guatemala were the
times I got to concelebrate Mass with Fr.
Rother. On one occasion, we celebrated
Mass in an Indian community high in the
mountains. Once we got off the dirt road,
on a mountain path, we had to cross over
a stream 21 times in our four-wheel
drive jeep to get to the community. They
celebrate Mass maybe two or three times a year.
We were there to celebrate the 90th birthday
of the oldest man in the community. On
another occasion, on a finca, we celebrated
a wedding Mass of a couple who looked, to
me, no more than 17 or 18 years old.
They were barely four feet tall. I found out
they had already been living together
for a year and had one child. They were
both 21 years old. I had a hard time
imagining the ages of the Indians. The 90 year
old had less gray hair than me.

The most powerful Mass I concelebrated was
the ten year anniversary Mass for Fr. Stan
Rother. Fr. Rother, a priest from Oklahoma,
was killed in his rectory by a right wing death
squad in July of 1981. He was the pastor of
Santiago (St. James), the town next to San
Lucas. The Indians of Santiago are a proud
and strong people. Over a thousand of their
people have been killed in the last decade.
Thirteen were gunned down by the military
just last December.

There were three bishops and 21 priests on
hand for the celebration. It was celebrated in
both Spanish and the local Indian language.
The Church was packed with over 1,500
people, most of them Indians. A delegation
from Oklahoma was on hand. It included two
bishops and friends and relatives of Fr.
Rother. At the Offertory time, corn was
brought up to the altar to be given to the
poor. Corn is the life blood of these
communities. It was humbling to see these
poor people give from their want to those less
fortunate than themselves.

Then, during the canon of the Mass,
something strange happened. The Indian
women began mumbling a short, repeating
prayer. It was in their Indian language. In the
sanctuary, where I was with the rest of the
priests, the prayer sounded like a low, deep
roar. They almost drowned out the bishops. I
found out later, this was a custom of the local
community. The whole Mass was a powerful
experience. The Indian people's
unconquerable spirit was clearly
demonstrated.

I left San Lucas on August 1st, profoundly
moved by my whole experience. One thing
that really stood out, for me, was the
opportunity to be exposed to a living, and
continual, Indian culture and society: a people
who have been under duress and oppression
low these last five centuries. Yet, they remain
undaunted in their will to survive and in their
spirit to be free. It was so unlike the
experience of the American Indian in the
U.S. where the genocide was so complete.
What remains of the North American Indian
culture and society is a shadow of their
former life- one of the worst chapters in our
national history.

The other deep impression I bring back with
me is the realization that, all things being
equal, if I were assigned in Guatemala today,
I'd be a dead man. We take so much for
granted in the States, especially our political
freedoms. Our high consumer life styles, in
which we are 6% of the world's population
consuming 30% to 40% of the world's
developed resources, directly connect us to
the poverty and political repression found in
the Third World. I am convinced, more than
ever, that we, who have our political
freedoms intact, are morally responsible to
use them to the fullest to help change the
unjust economic and political structures that
keep countries like Guatemala in dire poverty
and under political repression.

(Continued on page 7)

Prison Letter and Reflections

Apparently, Pecos translates from Spanish as "freckle." It doesn't take much poetic imagination or knowledge of anatomy to locate this particular freckle on the body-politic. This is a message from the inner-rectum of Pax Americana, the exclusiory zone. A place for those who weren't invited to the Empire's feast but turned up anyway, for the scraps, the silverware or to grab hold of the tablecloth and bring the whole arrangement crashing down.

The overcrowding here is intense, 500 inmates are divided into cages of 24. In my wing -- without partitions or walls -- 150 inmates and seven televisions compete for the airwaves 18 hours a day. There is little work, no programs or educational opportunities. Pecos is basically a warehouse for the alien poor, and admittedly not the best setting for an experiment in cross cultural relations. One quickly sheds the myths born of white guilt and liberalism. Oppression does not necessarily create heroic, oppressed people. The pathetic attempts to imitate the ways and culture of the oppressor are common enough. Racism/tribalism abounds -- exuded by both staff and inmates. For an interesting twist the population is 95 percent Mexican. So those who have historically been exploited and brutalized in Texas get to call the shots. The Arab, the Nigerian, the Jamaican, and even other Latinos are marginalized and scorned.

Being the only "white boy" here is plenty weird. I've gone through patches of feeling intensely isolated and a little paranoid. In the early stages of introductory abuse, I mused whether a cruel God had sent me here to run the racial gauntlet as an atonement for all the nasty things white folks had done down the ages. (Well, I did say I was getting a little paranoid!) One realizes one's racial group is under-represented when the transvestite community outnumbers it six to one.

Nowhere are lines drawn more clearly than in table fellowship. The transvestites sit separated, desired and despised for services rendered. In a crowded dining room I am, more often than not, left with empty spaces on either side of me. I tried convincing myself it was because I appear too macho that others are scared to sit next to me. But alas, the fear is of lice, or that dreadlocks are contagious or, more likely, the consequence of ostracism through association.

To me, my dreads are a symbol of solidarity with the indigenous, the self-imposed exile of discipleship and a "don't-do-me-any-favours" message to the white establishment. But of course they are often misunderstood and inadequate, like a lot of our efforts. In this locale they have earned me the name of "Medusa" from the homeboys.

One Friday night, things turned very ugly ... into one of the most brutal events I have ever witnessed. What began as a channel-changing dispute between a Jamaican and a Mexican quickly escalated. A few punches were thrown and soon four Mexicans were circling the smaller Jamaican. A larger Nigerian from the next cage came in -- trying to act as a peacemaker -- and put himself between the two parties. He tried to settle everyone down but lacked the linguistic skills to negotiate with the enraged Mexicans. There was a brief moment of stand-off before dozens of Mexicans came pouring out of other cages on the wing. They totally mobbed the Nigerian; there was no escape. There must have been better odds at the Alamo. They rushed him with fists, broomsticks, mop handles and razors. It was like sharks in a feeding frenzy.

Ciaron O'Reilly, a Catholic Worker from Australia, spent several months with our community and with Father Frank a couple of years ago while travelling in the US working with CW and other faith and resistance communities. On Jan. 1, 1991, Ciaron was arrested at Griffiss AFB in upstate New York, where he and fellow members of ANZUS Plowshares attempted to dismantle with hammers some B-52s on the runway.

The Nigerian was shackled and taken to the local hospital, order restored. The Administration response, to what in essence was a race riot, was pathetic. Any other jail if there is a loud dispute over television, they pull the plug for 24 hours. Any violence like that, a period of lockdown. But nothing ... I'm sure the attitude was to "blame-the-victim," size the blacks up as the only casualties and let it rest there. Pretty much an overall administrative racism -- passive and aggressive -- prevails.

Later that night I'm awakened by racially obscene screams and threats throughout the wing, directed at the remaining blacks. A weird sensation, being awakened to a nightmare, rather than from one. This is a nightmare alright, in 3-D and sense-surround.

The following morning, as a result of the blood-lust, there is a mood of Mexican nationalism sweeping the wing. I decide to play it low-key and spend the day in a siesta-siege on my bunk. What should come on the teevee as the movie of the day, but "Another Shrimp on the Barbie." Cheech in Australia. Yes, folks, it's the Kairos moment where the sublime turns ridiculous. Cheech, being a local hero, draws a max crowd in the cage. The plot, unfortunately, is about Cheech (the little Mexican abroad) being bounced around by all these Australians who are presented as obnoxious Afrikaan supremacist types. With that classic Australian line of Social-Darwinist inquiry, "What extraaaaaaction are ya?" I stay put on my bunk trying to look Italian, Khalahari or anything other!

As the weekend unfolds I grow more paranoid and spacy, probably through the lack of English-speaking conversational partners more than anything. I ask the supervisor for a transfer to the only English speaking cage, of Jamaicans and Nigerians, across the jail. It's "no-go," looks like they segregate on the basis of skin tone rather than linguistics.

The week rolls on, and on Thursday night I get along to mass for the first time. It's a most beautiful experience, 70 Mexicans and me ... gold chalice, communion-on-the-tongue, transvestites-in-the-choir. The rhythm and the ritual are so familiar and comforting. All these men singing away, reminds me of the masses we had at school.

The priest is Colombian and delivers with seems to be a passionate homily. I slip one of those "Isn't it cosy to be a Catholic vibes and all these realisations unfolding. Wow, like this is my church that's survived, it's not white and speaks Spanish. So face the music, buddy, move over and get some perspective. In practically this whole jail is Catholic, even the Bench Press Body Nazi types have huge tattoos of "Our Lady of Guadalupe" across their backs and the "Crucified Christ" on their biceps. Like, I've spent whole month fighting being here, but this is where I am and there's lots to learn. Much to learn about racism for a start -- token spell as a minority of one -- but a deeper level to locate and wrestle my inner demons of racism. For me this whole experience is an overhaul. From, at least, being a benevolent and altruistic member of the "Master Race," doling out sympathy and support as if it was mine to disappear. To an opportunity of deep solidarity with the anawym .. the coyotes, the smugglers, the culprits, the victims, the saints, the opportunists, brothers, fathers, husbands.

So like, "Stay, the mass has ended!"

There are kairos moments in this wasteland. One evening while watching yard soccer, a Syrian and an Afghan into a hilarious debate over "Which way Mecca?" East, west, sunsets and rising goes on and on. Neither wishing to come that they may have been bowing in the wrong direction these past weeks. I try to put the Galileo position -- that the world is round and Mecca is in both directions. It is received with as much enthusiasm when it was first put by the big "G" himself.

The Muslims start gathering in our cage to pray. Their rhythmic bowing and chanting of the Koran is both beautiful and sacred. Jamaican guy sings me a steady flow of reggae, whenever we meet. More melodies burst forth from a guitarist's friends in the rec yard. The Nigerian returns from the hospital. He tells me he doesn't blame the people, he blames the system. A Haitian friend mourns the death of Aristide. A Salvadoran recalls Romeo's funeral and his eldest brother, butchered by the military. A Colombian friend is collecting Australian stamps.

(Continued on page 7)

WHENEVER PEOPLE
SEEK THE GOOD, JUSTICE,
HUMANITARIAN LOVE,
SOLIDARITY, COMMUNION
AND UNDERSTANDING
BETWEEN PEOPLE ...
THERE WE CAN SAY, WITH
ALL CERTAINTY THAT
THE RESURRECTED ONE
IS PRESENT,
BECAUSE THE CAUSE FOR
WHICH HE LIVED,
SUFFERED,
WAS TRIED AND EXECUTED
IS BEING CARRIED
FORWARD.

-LEONARDO BOFF 1978-



Rita Corbin

(PRISON NOTES Continued)

In the last days, the mountain of Yahweh's shall be set over the highest mountains and shall tower over the hills.

And the nations shall stream to it, saying, Come, let us go to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and we may walk in his paths. For the teaching comes from Jerusalem, and from Jerusalem the word of Yahweh.

He will rule over the nations and settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not rise against nation; they will train for war no more."

ISAIAH 2:2-4

At the bottom line in Pecos, in the outside world and abroad is guns .. little ones, big ones. Twenty two killed, 25 wounded, in El Paso, Texas, as a soul possessed by a militarist-misogynist spirit goes wild with an automatic pistol. In the same week an attempt to ban the pistol is defeated in Congress.

One evening we are playing soccer when the shotgun on the tower unleashes four rounds. A sudden reminder of where we are. One of the Mexican lads had decided to organise their own "early release program." They had gone over the rec yard fence -- over wire and all. The four shots attract a lot of attention. Four hundred plus prisoners start moving toward the exit spot to cheer on the contestants. More guards with shotguns gather on the other side of the fence, while the escapees are chased into the fields. A stand-off develops, either side of the fence. As the escapees are run to the ground, folks on our side of the fence start throwing stones with some accuracy. The guards raise their shotguns and level them at us from about 20 yards. I think, "Time to level!" As I turn, "boom, boom" ... a little shocking but the shots are over our heads. Some of the guards are plenty pissed and heavily armed. Some of the Mexicans don't reach, just keep throwing stones. I decide to hang with the Haitians, assuming they have had lots of experience in situations like this!

Pecos is a parable! A microcosm of the New World Order. American guns surrounding Latinos, Africans, Filipinos, Arabs and folks of the Caribbean.

The burning Bush, speaking with promise of napalm, cluster and Fuel - Air - Explosives declares, "The future is ours to influence, to shape, to mold." He promises franchises as many as the stars.

There is a change of priorities underway in the US arsenal, but not a change of heart. The European theatre may have become less hair-trigger than in the 80's, with nuclear armed B-52s stood down from 10 minute alert status, ground based tactical nukes removed, nukes to be taken off warships and placed in storage. How much is merely refinement, retirement and updating is debatable. Bush and Snowcroft realise nukes are a political liability with First World allies (thanks to the peace movement) and hardly applicable in Third World intervention. They have been taken off the ground and placed in the air and under the sea. A continued determination to build SDI, the Stealth Bomber, Trident and Seawolf submarines assures that when push comes to nuclear shove there will be enough warheads to go around.

If anything, Bush's move signals a globe a little safer for First Worlders and a lot more dangerous for Third World folks -- with no deterrence on US military intervention. A rearrangement of forces against the Third World. "Invasion of Cuba" exercises are presently underway at Fort Chafee, Arkansas, complementing Congressional moves to tighten economic sanctions on the island. Welcome to the reign of Europe Inc., Japan Inc. and Fortress America. An ongoing conflict that is North vs. South -- with Australia, South Africa, Saudi and Israel as forward deployment.

The racist vigilantism sweeping Germany, and other parts of Europe, is an extension of this war on the poor. I mean, where do we Europeans get off? We spend the last five centuries moving into the Third World, ripping the guts out of the people and their resources and then get outraged when a few of the locals follow the money trail home, or are forced to flee the fascist stooges we set up.

It is the 499th anniversary of Columbus. A holiday in the US, hard to tell in Pecos. A dry run for the big 500th next year.

I'm sitting with a Native American from Mexico -- we are watching the televised baseball playoffs on this Columbus Day. Things are a little weird. One has a surreal vision of the Stadium, where thousands of white Atlanta Braves fans are waving rubber tomahawks above their heads in rhythmic unison. There in the midst of it all Jane Fonda (Ted Turner's power lease and home team being Atlanta, I guess) jumping up and down on the spot. This is what Pax Americana triumphant does to its indigenous and dissidents, the final humiliation, the Chestnut Tree Cafe, the embrace of Big Brother ... Meanwhile in DC, in front of mobs of Knights of Columbus, Bruce, Mary and Scott from the Catholic Worker pour blood on the statue of Columbus, spray paint "500 Years of Genocide!" and read statements. Charged with felonies, they are presently in the bowels of DC dungeons.

Repentance calls. Liberation awaits.

Claron O'Reilly

Contributions to Claron's support fund will get you on the mailing list and help get his letters out. Send your contribution to Fr. Frank Cordaro, PO Box 142, Logan IA 51546. Make checks out to Fr. Frank with notation for the Claron O'Reilly Support Fund.

**Write to Claron at:
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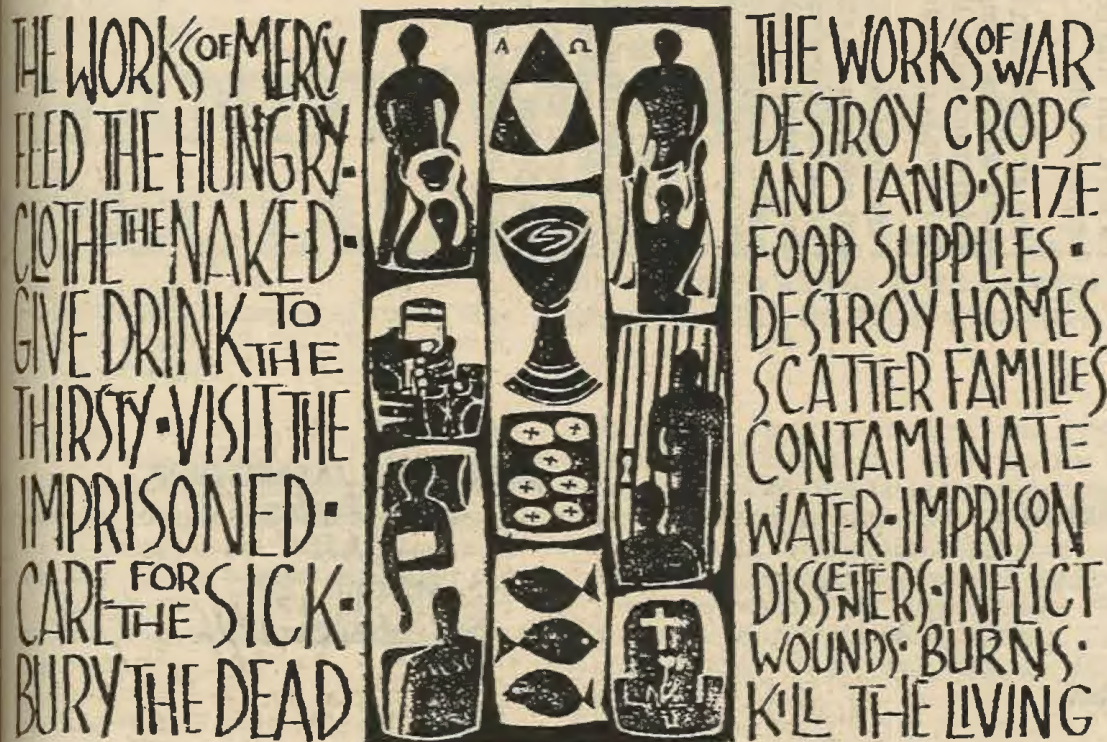
(GUATEMALA Continued)

There are many other things that I could write about. There are more things I need to sort out, digest and pray about from this trip. I want to thank my good friend Maggie Pharris and her kids for inviting me along. I could not think of a better way for me to be introduced to a Third World reality.

When I got to the airport in Guatemala City, we were informed that all planes out of Guatemala City were cancelled that Day. American Airlines put us up in the El Dorado motel. It is the most expensive and luxurious motel in Guatemala City. My last night in Guatemala was a real contrast to the time I spent in San Lucas. I took full advantage of American Airline's hospitality and ordered an expensive, and rich, fish dish for supper that night.

I got up the next day with a stomachache. By the time I got to the airport, and onto the plane, my stomachache had developed into a major illness. I found myself in the small restroom in the back of the plane, deathly ill, just before we were about to take off. A stewardess discovered me and called the pilot. The pilot had to make a snap decision. Take me back to the gate and leave me in Guatemala, or take a chance and fly with me. Luckily for me, the pilot decided to fly.

I was sick the whole time I was in the air. When we touched ground in Dallas, I completely lost it, and upchucked everything that was in my stomach. It took me five hours to fly home. My five hours in the air were, by far, the worst of the trip. I had acquired a case of food poisoning. Ironically, it was not the food I shared with the poor that made me sick, it was the food of the rich. I'm sure God was trying to tell me something in all this.



Rita Corbin

What I Have Witnessed Has Disturbed Me Out of My Complacency and Moved Me to Respond In Justice

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I AM NOT AFRAID OF DEATH

I am no longer afraid of death,
I know well
its dark and cold corridor
leading to life.

I am afraid of that life
which does not come out of death
which cramps our hands
and retards our march.

I am afraid of my fear
and even more of the fear of others,
who do not know where they are going,
who continue clinging
to what they consider to be life
which we know to be death!

I live every day to destroy death
I die every day to beget life,
and in this dying unto death,
I die a thousand times and
am reborn another thousand
through that live from my People
which nourishes Hope!

-Julia Esquivel